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National Guard Member Ben Johnson '11 is Middle School Teacher and Coach

When Ben Johnson '11 of Boiling Springs, S.C., transferred to Gardner-Webb University in 2008, he was determined to complete his degree and uphold his commitment to serve his country. "I joined the Army after graduating from high school and was stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., in 3/319th AFAR 82nd Airborne Division," Johnson related. "I decided after three years that I wanted to go back to school, so I joined the North Carolina National Guard, HHC 505th Engineer Combat Battalion."

Ben Johnson '11 was serving with the National Guard at Forward Operating Base Lagman in Zabul Province, Afghanistan, on the day his classmates graduated from Gardner-Webb. His professors in the Department of Health, Sport and Physical Education helped him complete the requirements for his degree before he was deployed.

He transferred to Gardner-Webb, because his wife is an alumna and he liked the University's welcoming atmosphere. While working on his degree in physical education at GWU, Johnson was deployed first to Iraq and then to Afghanistan. Both times Dr. Ken Baker, chair, and the professors in the Department of Health, Sport and Physical Education (HSPE) helped him complete his classes before he left. The second time, they found him a student teaching position at a year-round school so that he could finish his requirements to graduate before leaving for Afghanistan.

"Dr. Dee Hunt (Vice President of Student Development) and the whole HSPE Department helped me so much with many different things," reflected Johnson, who now serves as a sergeant first class. "If I had questions or needed help with something, there was always someone who could help. The people at Gardner-Webb—students and staff—were interested in my success. I can still call one of my professors from Gardner-Webb with a question, and they are glad to help."

Johnson teaches physical education and coaches football, wrestling and track at Shelby (N.C.) Middle School. "Gardner-Webb prepared me for my career by setting up school visits so I could observe teachers in action," Johnson observed. "They also set up visits where I would teach a lesson in one of the surrounding schools or go to help with Special Olympics. Not only did it prepare me for my career, but it also built up my confidence and desire to be a teacher and work for the community."

